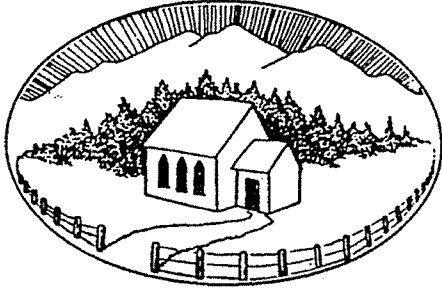


# Rural Network News



No. 28

November 2004

We were called to be witnesses, not  
lawyers or judges

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for ministry in  
neighbourhood and land-based communities.  
*Te kaitiakitanga, te manaakitanga, te kotahitanga.*

Please share this newsletter with others you think may be  
interested. Feel free to make photocopies.  
*Responses to items always welcome.*

## Gardening Notes

It is the time of the year to walk around the garden with a weedicide that will eradicate the broad leaf weeds that you don't want. At a distance Cape Weed may look attractive in a paddock with its yellow tones but it is not tolerated in the lawn or garden. Dandelions may smile at you in all their innocence but they are not the gardener's favourite.

Various plants are used in the manner of a parable or symbol in the Bible.

Prophets used the fig, olive and vine to express God's goodness in terms of a fertile land that yielded a bountiful crop. A rich harvest on earth was the reward of righteousness; barren land and trees, the punishment for sinfulness. Abundance of the harvest proved God's love for humankind.

Rapidly fading wild plants symbolised the transience of life: "The grass withers, the flower fades..." (Is 40:8).

Jesus used the lilies of the field to illustrate the benefits of striving for the kingdom of God (Mt 6:25:33). He compared the kingdom of God to the mustard seed, which "becomes the greatest of all shrubs" (Mk 4:30-

32) and used the vine and the branch to represent the relationship between God and humanity.

One of the groups forming the conglomerate hosting the next International Rural Church Association Conference in Korea is the Dandelion Community.

The Dandelion! The weed I want to eradicate used to name a Christian Community.

The Dandelion has deep roots. If the root snaps when you try to pull it out you can be sure that it will grow again. Chip the top off and it soon sprouts, sometimes with more heads than previously. When it matures and the seed head appears the wind scatters the seed and it is planted in other places.

Deep roots are a characteristic of people with strong faith. The prayer of faithful Christians is that the Word of God will be scattered abroad.

Next time you move to eradicate a dandelion pause to think of it as a symbol of deep and fruitful faith.

Lloyd Vidler, Bowral, NSW, Australia

## 2006 International Conference

### Kyongnam Province, South Korea

The committee of the International Rural Church Association met in Adelaide, following the Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference. Proposals for the next IRCA Conference were received from Canada, Indonesia and Korea, all of a high standard, offering valuable opportunities for learning and networking.

The decision was made that the conference will be held in South Korea from 19-23 June 2006 with a community development theme. Information will be made available as planning proceeds. Contact the editor of this newsletter (who is the Chair of IRCA) if you want to know more.

## In Loving Memory of Grace Judd

16 September 1923 - 9 August 2004

On 13 August we gathered to celebrate the life of Grace Judd, a much-loved member of our St Paul's Congregation, Kaiwaka.

We paid tribute to Grace a year ago in this rural newsletter and we were delighted to present it to her as a Framed Tribute at the Community Christmas Service. Grace will always be remembered in our hearts for her constant faith, and her support of others of all ages throughout her caring life. Thank you Lord, for Grace.

Christine Bygrave, Kaiwaka, Northland

See [www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/RuralMinistry/](http://www.schoolofministry.ac.nz/RuralMinistry/) for  
archive of *Rural Network News*

## Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference 2004

There was fun, fellowship, food, banter on the bus and a very big bishop.

There were also personal challenges, hard work and achievements and probably quite a lot done for Trans-Tasman relationships.

And then there were the mayoral reception and the conference dinner where the big bishop was the guest speaker.

This was the five days of the rural ministry conference in Clare in South Australia from September 27 to October 1.

Day one of the conference involved being picked up by bus en masse from various hotels, motels, backpackers and Adelaide airport. Assisted by Peter Gill the two-hour journey north to Clare flew by and set the tone for the rest of the conference.

Peter, a dinkum Aussie farmer, filled us in on the farming in the region they call the Mid-North. There were hoots of derisive Kiwi laughter from all over the bus at what they called a "range of hills," a river, and a valley, and indeed "reliable rainfall."

Peter gave us an expert commentary so by the time we reached Clare we had a good feeling for the area, its production which is mostly arable crops, the climate, the challenges and how it is different from New Zealand.

Sheep are very much secondary to the arable crops in this part of the world. They are also merinos bred for their fine wool rather than our romney-based meat breeds.

Our trip to Clare was enlivened by a stop at a gas station for a mid-morning cuppa. Shirley, one of our number, declared she could not imagine her day being any good at all without a good flat white so we stopped somewhere on the way.

It was clear the staff didn't quite know what to do with the 40 or so of us. They brought us out a cup of instant coffee or teabag tea one at a time. No thought of making a trayful and bringing them out to us all at once and the food could best be described as truckstop.

To really top the experience for Shirley, her cup leaked - which, she maintained, was true evidence that God had a sense of humour. Shirley certainly did.

However, we arrived in Clare in time for lunch at the hall of the Uniting Church just down the street from St Michael's Catholic Church where the conference would be based.

Clare is a town about the size of Waipukurau, here in Hawke's Bay, a town of about 3000 people whose principal purpose is as a rural service town - like Waipukurau.

Clare is also the centre of a rapidly expanding wine district but a small town it remains, making it an ideal setting for a conference to discuss rural ministry.

After lunch we were free for a while to discover the delights of Clare and my advice to anyone who ever is fortunate enough to visit is do not under any circumstances pass up the opportunity to have a coffee and something to eat at The Bakehouse in the main street.

The town made us hugely welcome. From those of us fortunate enough to have billets with the locals, to the mayor Patricia Jacka, to the people in the shops who served us and knew why we were all there.

Once we were settled with our billets it was time for the evening mayoral reception in the town hall.

The next day was bus-tour time. We piled into buses for a tour around different parts of the agricultural landscape that is the Mid North region.

From a merino stud in the hands of the fourth generation of the Davidson family, to historic Bungaree Station which has been owned by the Hawker family since 1841.

We also saw a hilltop land-restoration project to bring back some of the original vegetation and insect life of the area. Wondering how the bus that brought us there was going to turn around in the paddock was a bit of a distraction here! The always welcome rain held off until we had finished the outside part of our day.

The evening was the official conference dinner and there Bishop Garry Weatherill, the Bishop of Willochra, was the guest speaker. Bishop Garry is the biggest bishop in the biggest diocese in Australia - from just north of Adelaide right up to the Northern Territory border. He told us the diocese has no geographical centre because all that remains of the town of Willochra is the fireplace of the old pub.

All his 82 congregations have fewer than 100 people and many of them are fewer than 30. Much of it is Outback area and the congregations are poor. Anglicans are very much in the minority with Roman Catholics and Methodists more dominant. He told us stories from his life and his ministry and kept us all well entertained.

For most of us the next three days were the meat of the conference broken by wonderful meals supplied by various congregations and groups from Clare.

Rose Harding, Hastings, Hawke's Bay

## Tent Ministry

The apostle Paul was very good at juggling his time and finding somewhere to stay as he moved around. Even prison provided him with valuable opportunities for ministry! His ministry has often been referred to as "tent ministry" because of this nomadic style and his ability to make do with what he had and not worry about what he didn't have.

There is a lot of talk these days about diminishing parish numbers, the merging of churches and even closure of some. These are the casualties of modern society for sure and one can commiserate with the parishes concerned but seldom do people, or the national church bodies, look at the casualty of the minister in the midst of it all.

What happens to the minister faced with the parish decision to reduce a minister's time?

What happens to the minister who is faced with the parish decision to reduce a minister's time, or tell a minister that the parish can no longer afford his/her services?

It is not just a characteristic of rural ministry. It happens in the cities too but there the minister has a lot more support and the possibility for other employment. In rural areas there is often the added loneliness of being away from family or colleagues. It can be really tough going with many uncertainties about the future.

Questions uncontrollably come to mind, like:

- Have I failed this community?
- Was there anything I should have done differently?
- Is it my fault that people have not been attracted to the church?

These questions can be magnified when experienced by a young minister or someone in their first parish.

A good supervisor (often hard to find in the rural setting) is an essential ingredient for sanity but the more a minister is put through this experience the more demoralising it is. Today's ministers are more and more likely to encounter this situation and the instability of marginal parishes.

We should be considering carefully how we prepare ministers to face this possibility

Often there are family dependants to consider, disruption to schooling, the loss of friends and lifestyle. Supplementary work doesn't often materialise in the country and any financial shortfall can have serious consequences. The whole issue concerns me greatly and

I feel we should be considering carefully how we prepare ministers to face this possibility.

Ministers need, amongst so many other things, to be flexible and adaptable. Previous qualifications can help at such a time but care is also required to keep even these working skills updated for they are quickly superseded. This needs time out to achieve.

### THE "TENT STYLE"

An example of the sort of flexibility I'm talking about in ministry was found in a previous parish where I exercised "tent ministry", quite by accident actually.

It was a 75% ministry position, not sufficient to meet financial needs. I met up with a tour operator who was looking for some help for his business and after some negotiations we opened up a tour office, fronting the main street of a holiday/retirement town of about 5000. He was sympathetic to the church cause and allowed this office to double up as the church office too.

I worked there every morning and church people found it very convenient to drop in while they were out shopping and have a chat with their minister. Church matters could often be dealt with more effectively. We had tea-making facilities and even held meetings in the office at times. I ran a breakfast for business people in the street at one stage where they talked about business issues and at the end we prayed.

Officially, I was the office manager for the tour company (skills I had received earlier and business qualifications helped) and did all the bookings, designed and arranged tours and escorted many of them myself during annual leave or my days off.

Introduced ...to tour clientele as a "minister in her day time job"

With the support of my boss, who always introduced me to tour clientele as a "minister in her day time job", the people soon got to know me..

People would come in off the street to book or enquire about a tour and the conversation invariably turned to "and you're a minister too I understand!" They would then start to pour out their problems or ask about church services (there was appropriate wording on the door to indicate this was also a church office).

The tours provided other opportunities and again I found myself engaged in all sorts of faith discussions and at some very odd times. I recall one such occasion when I was drawn into a conversation at a dinner table. The question was: "Can you explain to me what the Trinity is all about? I have never been able to understand it!"

Other comments would be of a more private nature about their own churches, their satisfaction or otherwise, or about themselves and their families.

Our clientele came from a wide area of the upper North Island and we took tours all over New Zealand, Australia, Norfolk Is, Vanuatu and other Pacific Islands.

The biggest plus was the main street frontage

Our own church benefited from the tour association big time with some of the local people coming to worship out of curiosity. We definitely gained more church members. The biggest plus was the main street frontage that suited everyone and created an outreach for the community.

Our church also gave a week of my time to be involved in a summer programme for the town, a very popular New Year beach destination for young people. As a registered nurse, and in conjunction with the police and the Whangamata Goodtime Community Board, I was able to run a First Aid Post for that week, relieving the police of this task. It earned me a ride home in the paddy wagon each night as a safety measure for me! Our tent had a notice that read "Sponsored by the Trinity United Presbyterian Church". This venture didn't attract any new members but it did create valuable community goodwill. Also our drunken teenage charges did appreciate having a safe place to come when things got out of hand.

Being the church in the community is a great way to go. It's a matter of making those connections and finding where the people need you most.

*Prepared by Barbara Faga-Curteis for Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference 2004*

## Team Ministry Gathering

### Bay of Islands Co-operating Parish

"Absolutely great," said one visitor at a midwinter get-together of people in Local Shared Ministry.

Trinity Uniting Parish of Whangamata, Pauanui and Tairua, sent six people to meet with the more experienced Bay of Islands Team. A cosy little weekend for people from the Methodist and Presbyterian traditions.

It could have been but the Bay of Islands Parish has an Anglican Enabler, so four Anglican Local Shared Ministry teams joined the 'Co-op' people for a stimulating Sunday afternoon and evening.

Each team told a story from their life and experience. Some have done wonders with music. Some have developed huge outreach ministries both locally

(involvement with a disabilities trust) and nationally (Christian World Service, denominational social services). One Parish markets Ezee meals purchased from Wellington City Mission.

Most are experiencing a dramatic increase in involvement in worship leadership. There are many new approaches to pastoral care. All spoke of a revival of the commitment of lay people.

"It's just so good to be with others who are making the same journey," said one participant. "Charting new paths for mission and ministry can be a lonely experience. This weekend has given our team a huge boost of confidence."

Ideas were interchanged and experiences shared. People laughed, listened and learned. "A fantastic experience" was a common response.

Kerikeri Anglican Parish sum up Team Ministry as:

- Lay involvement; on-going training; community outreach and development; commitment; all baptised have ministry; loyal to Christ and each other
- Sharing stories and life journeys; help for each other, by each other; Anglican tradition upheld; recognition of gifts and talents; encouragement, empowerment, enabler; diversity of gifts
- Ministry by all, to all and for all; input by everyone; nurture of people, gifts and talents; inspiration, integrity, interdependence; support for each other; trust in the Holy Spirit for direction and guidance; respect and responsibility; YES to LSM!

Local Shared Ministry is a rigorous model in which individuals are 'called' by a very distinctive process to specific ministries in the life of a small congregation that does not have any stipendiary ministry. The model asks a major commitment of the local people to take responsibility for the mission and ministry of their own congregations.

But it also supports them with the resources of the wider church and, especially, an experienced and qualified Ministry Enabler who works closely with the ministry team.

See: *The Cavalry Won't be Coming: Strategies for Local Shared Ministry in Small Congregations*, Dave Mullan, \$19 from OCBBooks, 39 Princes St, Dunedin.

Rural Network News July 2004 has a review of this book. ed.

You can't plough a paddock by turning it over in your mind

## A Book Under Review

### From North and South and the Other Side of the Tasman

*Challenge and Opportunity: Being Church in Rural New Zealand: The Methven Rural Ministry Forum 22 May 2004* edited by John Bruerton, Phil McKendry, Nicola Robertson and Garth Cant.

Studies in Rural Change Number 21, price: \$10, available from 7 Owens Terrace, Christchurch 8004

#### Review 1: Bill Bennett, Hawkes Bay

The Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit has built up an enviable reputation for mounting conferences and forums on rural ministry.

This latest event has been recorded and published under the title: *Challenge and Opportunity: Being Church in Rural New Zealand*. It comprises No. 21 in the excellent series: "Studies in Rural Change". The foreword written by Garth Cant, one of the editors, gathers the many threads of that day under the title: "From 'Rural Church Alive' to 'Stories of Hope'". Not only will the 120 participants enjoy recapturing the energy of that day, but those of us living elsewhere will also benefit.

After reading the report I am amazed that so much was packed into one day. It began with the question: "What is happening in the countryside?" To help answer this, the mayors of Selwyn, Ashburton and Mackenzie, each in turn, made excellent presentations of the issues that their region is currently facing. This ensured that any debate was anchored in reality.

Common threads were: the consequences for communities and the environment of the explosion in large-scale dairy farming; the proliferation of life-style block developments, especially on the fringes of towns; reductions in the number of schools in many districts; the positive aspects of increased production on land (for example the expansion in grape-growing in North Canterbury); the effects of tourism for some rural areas; inadequate funding for roading in other areas; and issues of water allocation and irrigation (the recently abandoned Meridian hydro plans and the water consent requests from dairy farmers).

If the growing pains are deeply felt by some, the mayors on balance felt that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks.

This set the scene for ten working groups to broadly explore the question: "How are congregations and community groups responding to these changes?" The report identifies the issue of creating a new community out of those who have lived most of their lives there, and those who have recently arrived (e.g. dairy

farmers). Some shared ways in which churches are developing links and making newcomers welcome. Others were asked to offer examples of community-binding events for both long-term and new residents. Many ideas and successful examples bubbled to the surface.

Rural churches in general try to be community-friendly. People at the forum were looking at ways to minister to all in the community, and in particular to appreciate other people's work rhythms and life-styles. Stories were shared of several creative and inventive ideas to create community and church links. Each area represented had a different story to tell.

The report offers a worship format that uses images grounded in everyday life. Rosie Staite comments: "Public worship is to honour God, to add meaning and hope to our lives... It is the shop window of the church..."

A number of specific stories of hope and faith were included in the day and the report. Such stories sustain and encourage people, who often feel they are alone in their struggles. Ian Hyslop comments: "ministry is ecumenical, hard work, happens in a variety of contexts, is where people celebrate and have fun, and is where there is food!"

Finally, there is a chapter in which Robyn McPhail ably speaks of 'Rural Ministry: looking back and looking forward'. She makes the following points:

- Rural churches are not second-class churches
- Rural churches are seed-sowing churches
- Relationships are important
- Rural churches specialise in practical Christianity
- Viability depends on mission to the community
- Rural people are people of the earth

I warmly commend this report, as it strongly affirms all who minister in rural areas throughout New Zealand.

#### Review 2: Lloyd Vidler, New South Wales

Part of the genius of church people in rural areas is their ability to gather across denominational boundaries to share their insights. From such insights they gain inspiration and their hope is renewed.

Such a gathering occurred at St John's Presbyterian Church in Methven in May 2004. *Challenge and Opportunity* is the record of that gathering.

The organizers wisely invited the leaders of three local government areas to share their insights of the affect of change in their areas. They highlighted changes in land usage, the pressure placed on infrastructure both physical and social, the interaction of different values existing between traditional rural dwellers and life-style block owners.

The availability and appropriate use of water was also raised as an important issue.

Group discussions which followed were against the background of the information shared by the local government leaders.

The group reports reveal a variety of ways in which congregations are working to meet the challenge of change in their communities. Their commitment and innovation is to be applauded whether it be in the attempts made to reach newcomers or endeavours made to establish adequate lay ministry in those places where ordained ministry is not available.

The stories under the general heading 'Congregations and Communities responding to Change' are an important part of the book. Each of them deserves to be read and thoughtfully considered.

"Restoring St Patrick's Church" impressed me as a bold and innovative approach to overcoming the recurring problem of the rescuing old buildings from decay and giving them a new birth.

"Thinking Ahead - Ministry in the Mackenzie" is helpful as it pointed to the way in which the past history of a congregation can be used as an inspiration for the future.

"A Story of Relationship Building - the Amuri Parish" is important because it is a warts and all story. Most people endeavouring to bring about change know that it is hardly ever as easy as some would lead us to believe.

To ice all the good things contributed to the conference by so many people was Robyn McPhail's address in which she reflected on her years in rural ministry and her commitment to the future of the rural church.

There were several places in her paper where I wanted to interject with a hallelujah! One of those places was when she said:

The decline of the church in the west is happening in a large part because ministry has been tied to traditional structures: a pyramid system with the bosses at the top and local people at the bottom. We need to turn this upside down: local and their people deciding plans and priorities together and being the church; clergy, regional leaders and synods supporting this by providing solidarity and training.

It is hardly possible to comment on this publication without noting that it Number 21 of the Series "Studies in Rural Change" of which Garth Cant is the Series Editor.

Over a number of years Garth has ensured that various conferences on rural ministry have had their proceedings recorded. His work as an editor has made a body of work on rural ministry available to those interested in that field.

### Review 3: Jolyon Manning, Central Otago

#### RENAISSANCE IN RURAL FAITH

That there has been a remarkable turnaround in the settlement fortunes of many rural districts in the past five years is highlighted by the papers and discussion set out in the splendid booklet *Challenge and Opportunity: Being Church in Rural New Zealand*.

Both the well known 'urban drift' and the 'drift north' movements that have so dominated the picture in the South for the post-war decades has come to an end or at the very least tapered off somewhat. This is a major demographic feature that has impacted on rural settlement patterns and rural ministry.

The turn around has taken place in the past five years and promises to accelerate with the retirement of the post-war 'baby boom' generation. In two year's time the first ranks reach the age 60 life cycle milestone.

The 120 participants of the Methven gathering were drawn from widely scattered rural settlements in many inland parts of Canterbury. Indeed I had to get my New Zealand atlas out to locate some of the townships.

Whilst there was a predominance of 'grey power' delegates coming from a wide range of lifetime vocational experience there was clearly an atmosphere of faith adventure where long timers are making a big effort to a contingent of new settlers to these districts.

It is important to understand that in the opening years of the new century many of our older folk today enjoy double the post-'retirement' years than their counterparts at the time of World War II. They are blessed with a wider range of working life experience, more advanced and continuing education, better health prospects, and perhaps above all else an unprecedented level of mobility and communication opportunity. More energy for faith commitments.

This little booklet is very well laid out and should be an ideal aid for rural parish exploration by different church denominations in today's changing social, economic and cultural environment. The splendid informed introductions from the Mayors of the Selwyn, Ashburton and Mackenzie districts provided an essential background setting for those gathered to review the challenges and the opportunities in being church in rural New Zealand.

The mayors highlighted the very dramatic changes now taking place in many rural districts with new farmland tenure and options, the recent introduction of advanced irrigation, pastoral farm and horticultural technologies, and notably the unprecedented rate of change in land ownership. Many of these communities had become accustomed during the postwar decades of 'urban drift' and 'drift north' with the loss of many younger folk.

Quite suddenly it seems these traditional trends are now being reversed.

Wealthy retiring urban families are now looking to our icon rural districts in which to enjoy their 'freedom years'. So today rural ministry is at the forefront of change: opportunity orientated rather than problem focused.

Thus the challenge in rural ministry in 2004 is distinctly different from that which faced church congregations at the time of the earlier Methven Rural Ministry Forum held in 1989, a time when radical deregulated Rogernomics challenged every rural community.

Out-migration has been replaced by in-migration. It is not surprising therefore that one of the many small forum discussion groups came up with the view that "rural ministry is at the forefront of change today."

## Equipping for Change: Planning for Growth

Described as being for small or rural churches, this event in early November was more like the bank ad about a 'small business' that was becoming a medium sized business.

Presented by the Waiareka Weston Parish in North Otago for Small and Rural Churches, this weekend was one Parish telling their story, and what an encouraging story.

The story was presented by the Rev Nancy Parker and members of the church (they see themselves as a church, not a parish, because 'church' means people).

The story was supported by a keynote address from the Rev John Daniel, of the Presbyterian Church's Mission Resource Team, who equipped us with "tools for our tool box".

Then on Sunday morning, we joined with the congregation for worship in the refurbished buildings, and enjoyed the hospitality of the parish. One of their key points - always include food!

People came from Mayfield, Mid-Canterbury and Knapdale, Southland, any many places in between. Many stayed over the Saturday night, and enjoyed viewing the penguins.

The good things that Waiareka Weston has could describe many parishes. These are the building blocks for growth:

- Faithful hard working people
- Well maintained buildings
- Community participation

They identified potential blockages to growth often appeared in respect to church leadership, a lack of understanding of on-going needs, tight purse strings, youth leadership and children's programmes, confining church to Sundays and not life as a whole and a lack of community vision.

They stressed the importance of honest and open processes, with these suggested five steps:

1. Church Structure
  - a. Involve the movers and shakers of the church in decision making
  - b. Seek help from denominational or wider church resource people
  - c. Form a specifically designated forward planning committee.
2. Improvements to buildings essential for growth
3. Changes in Worship
4. Focus on communication, affirmation, hospitality and fellowship among the Church Family
5. Community outreach

For me key points were

- Are structures getting in the way of the gospel?
- Have a plan
- Pray like crazy
- Ensure good communication

As one who had been part of this parish (before we shifted away), it was great to see what has been done. And to know that, if they can do it, depending on their God, others can too. The same word that we heard at the Trans-Tasman Conference in Clare, South Australia, kept cropping up this weekend too - **Passion**.

We need to be passionate about our church life.

Marion Partridge, Herbert, Otago

## Changing Property Needs

Do you have experience of wanting to sell church property that is no longer needed?

Or buying and shifting property from one place to another?

Some rural areas continue to experience population decline; other areas have problems to solve because of population increase.

Can we pool our wisdom and share advice and ideas for dealing with change in relation to property?

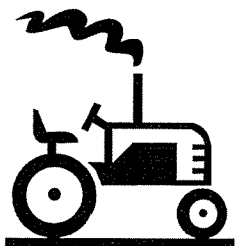
Please contact the editor if you have a story to tell or if you know of someone who might be persuaded to contribute some insights through this newsletter.



# Christian Farmers Conference

## Successful Farming

### What is it?



Farm consultant Mark Gardiner, lecturer Robbie Scott, and David Cox of Australian Indigenous Ministries were the main speakers at the Ridgecrest Conference Centre in New South Wales in July this year.

People on the land and in rural areas are today juggling at least four main priorities:

- Profitability
- Lifestyle
- Sustainability
- Spirituality

People who ignore one or more of these items are missing out on a whole or balanced life.

Mark Gardiner had some fascinating graphs and figures showing that many peoples' goals were not maximum income but *satisfactory income* and there is a difference.

People need to be made aware of this alternative choice. Many advisors do not make people aware of this option because this may mean reducing farm inputs. Most advisers and consultants work from a vested interest or not a whole of life perspective.

Other major priorities of a significant number of farmers were:

- children in worthwhile occupations;
- working with family members;
- leaving their farm in good or better condition;
- meeting a challenge;
- enjoying their work.

The men were all challenged to consider how much other members of the family or business were involved in the setting of goals or priorities. Many left with a resolve to talk to spouse and children about this.

As Christian businessmen we were challenged by David Cox to remember three things in our life and work:

- all things belong to God;
- we are just stewards of the land;
- we need to keep an eternal perspective on all things that happen

Our vocation is a calling from God and we are to work hard, work smart, work clever, manage our time, show integrity, live generously and be prepared to tell people what God has done for each of us.

Ross Neville, Dubbo, NSW, Australia

Loving God, we are an odd mob.

WE THANK YOU FOR THE WIDELY DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE AND EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH WHICH CONSTITUTE THE MEMBERSHIP OF YOUR CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY.

We give thanks for those who express faith through rigid creeds and behaviour.

WE GIVE THANKS FOR OTHERS WHO SEEM DESTINED TO FOLLOW CHRIST AMONG INNUMERABLE QUESTIONS AND DOUBTS.

We give thanks for members whose faith appears to be a profound childlike simplicity, unhurried and unworried.

WE GIVE THANKS FOR THOSE WHO SEEM UNABLE TO FIND ONE SATISFYING WORD WITH WHICH TO DESCRIBE YOU, YET WHOSE FAITH IS CONSTANTLY RENEWED BY A WORDLESS AWE IN THE PRESENCE OF UNNAMEABLE LOVE.

Lover of diversity, God of all souls, continue to give us the grace to treasure each other with all our oddness and to use these differences as we minister to the diversity of people who share this twenty-first century with us.

TO YOUR PRAISE AND GLORY. AMEN.

Used in Opening Worship, 27 September 2004 Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference, Clare, South Australia



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Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church and its gospel mission gratefully received.

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